

PATRICK IRELAND: THE DUCHAMP PORTRAIT 1966/67



The Corcoran Gallery of Art is particularly pleased to present for the first time the exhibition of the *Duchamp Portrait*, 1966/67, by the artist Patrick Ireland. The presentation of this work gives a unique opportunity to view another aspect of Duchamp.

In 1966 Patrick Ireland (then Brian O'Doherty) asked Marcel Duchamp if he could "take his portrait." Duchamp agreed, and accepted an invitation to dinner on April 6. The artist, who holds a medical degree from University College, Dublin, rented an electrocardiogram machine and, before dinner, recorded Duchamp's heartbeat.

The cardiographic record became the basis for the three portraits of Marcel Duchamp, with the associated drawings and studies shown here.

Two of the three portraits trace Duchamp's heartbeat as it occurred on lead I of the cardiogram. One of these single-window portraits gives Duchamp's resting pulse rate; the second is extremely slow—eight beats per minute. The other traces leads I, II and III.

The heartbeat of one of the most charismatic figures in modern art, who invented the ready-made, thus becomes a kind of technological ready-made. As such, it engages in a dialogue with some of the most influential—and dangerous—ideas that have affected modernist art, a dialogue entered into, as Joseph Masheck writes in his introduction to the catalogue, "most politely." "It could be argued," he goes on, "that [the *Duchamp Portrait*] was made by two artists, but it could not be argued that it was made by no artist." The elusive issues raised by the *Duchamp Portrait* center around questions of identity and repetition, and the always problematic definition of what we agree to call art.

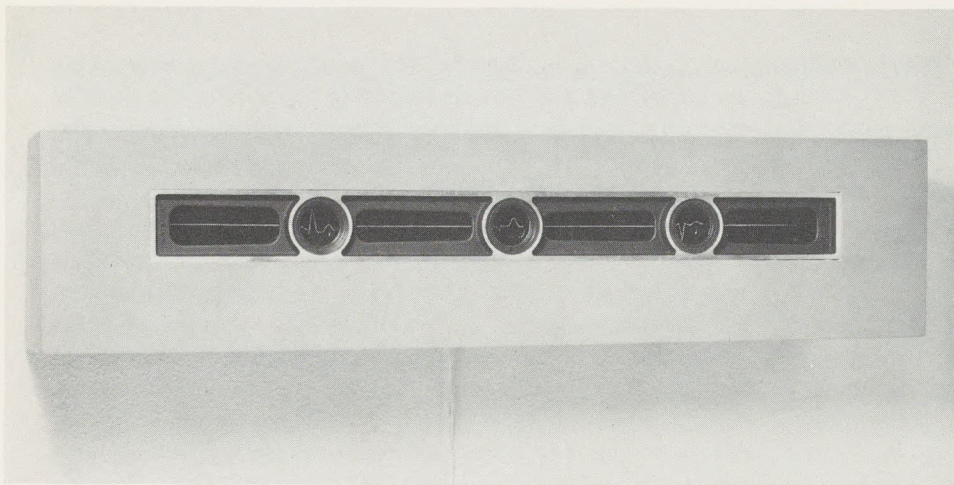
The Corcoran Gallery of Art wishes to thank the artist for his interest and cooperation, which have made the exhibition possible.

Roy Slade, Director

Cover: *Study for Portrait of Duchamp II and III*, 1967, liquitex on cardboard, 31½ x 29½".

Opposite: *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp I*, 1966, mixed media, 7 x 30¾ x 20½".





In 1966-67 Patrick Ireland produced a group of flat images and motorized constructions that includes and grows out of an actual cardiogram of Marcel Duchamp. As commemorative sculpture dealing directly with the heart, this material has a categorical precedent in the French Renaissance "heart monument," of which the most famous examples are Pierre Bontemps' *Monument for the Heart of Francis I* and Germain Pilon's for that of Henry II. Ireland's works, however, relate more radically to conventional portrait sculpture and its accurate reporting of bodily detail. What led academic sculptors to use calipers and dividers to certify the extrapolated dimensions and proportions of their forms, leads Ireland to the equally self-effacing but still more conceptual application of a medical instrument to his sitter's circulatory system.

That Ireland should have hooked up his electrical leads to the living, pulsating body of Marcel Duchamp has an obvious appropriateness. It is less obvious that it should have been a cardiogram rather than an electroencephalogram—used by Robert Morris in a *Self-Portrait* of 1963. Yet an EEG might have placed a presumptuous emphasis on the conceptual in the sitter/artist (in this case not the self) and his art, perhaps at the expense of concreteness and humanity. We do not want to look inside the irony machine. Although the healthy muscularity of the heart—as against the cybernetic coolness of the brain—can provoke sentimentality, it is likelier than the brain to evoke the soul, the body's *animating principle*. Legend claimed that after his death St. Augustine's heart could be heard beating during the "Sanctus": no such presence could be expected from the otherwise equally transcendental brain of Einstein. The heart is the capital of the body, even if the brain is its seat of government. William Harvey, who



penetrated its anatomical mysteries, did admire "the most pure substance of the brain, or the most resplendent and divine constitution of the eye, or the flesh of the heart itself," but went on to consider the heart alone "the beginning of life, the Sun of the microcosm, as proportionably the Sun deserves to be called the heart of the world."

If Ireland's taking of the cardiogram calls attention to his role as physician, it may also suggest the special importance of Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood. It was in the process of applying to the history of medicine the methods of Wölfflin in art history that H. E. Sigerist realized that the decisive element in Harvey's modernity was his reliance on *calculation*. It is just the unmediated directness of quantification in Ireland's cardiogram portraits that is most contemporary. His use of carpenters' levels for window openings in the artificial oscilloscopes may recall real rulers in Jasper Johns's paintings and Robert Morris's sculptures, and the conspicuous acceptance of the Stanley trademark relates generally to Pop art. The emphasis here, however, is more in line with later, more impassive quantification, extending to measurement the scrupulous receptivity that the Impressionists had devoted to the strictly visual perception of totalities. The cardiogram converts the neural immediacy of this Impressionist passivity before nature into a fully *muscular* immediacy that is as distinctly sculptural as the Impressionist instantaneous optical survey was pictorial. For the equivalent to cardiography in portraiture we would have to turn to seismography in landscape.

Some of these pieces resemble the Minimalist sculpture of the mid-1960s. The insistent vertical alignment of three boxlike rectangular forms in the drawing for an oscilloscope with three windows, from 1966, can be likened to works by Don Judd at the time. Moreover, Robert Morris had already used the recorded sound of a heartbeat emanating from a box in a work made three or four years before that. Yet these and other parallels—such as the conceptually documentary aspect of the mounted medical record of the cardiogram, and the use of albums for compiling informational material—are not pressing issues. If anything, the problem is the obliviousness of these works to the stylistic implications of their forms, so preoccupied are they with their governing subject. These works are hardly nonobjective, although, with a Johnsean irony nicely attuned to the sitter, their immediate subject matter is "representational" but intrinsically abstract.

Ireland seems careful about the relation of this art to Duchamp's own; the raw heartbeat itself relates to the body as *given* in Duchamp's *Three Erotic Objects*. But the paper cardiogram is not a ready-made because it is a genuine drawing, begun at one point and moment and ended at another, drawn at two



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

ELECTROCARDIOGRAPH STUDY

Marcel Duchamp

4/4/'66

TECHNICIAN

DOCTOR

B. O'Doherty

I

II

III

aV<sub>R</sub>

aV<sub>L</sub>

aV<sub>F</sub>

V<sub>1</sub>

V<sub>2</sub>

V<sub>3</sub>

V<sub>6</sub>

V<sub>5</sub>

V<sub>4</sub>

R3030

STANDARDIZATION: 10 MM EQUALS ONE MV; TIME LINES SPACED AT INTERVALS OF 0.1 SECOND.

(JAN.'66)

Mounted Cardiogram, 1966, ink on paper, 11 x 8½"



removes (machine, doctor), by the actual, if involuntary, movement of Duchamp's heart. It could be argued that it was made by two artists, but it could not be argued that it was made by no artist. Neither is the cardiogram a simple souvenir of Duchamp, on the order of a lock of hair, since it only exists in forms which the artist/physician has lent it. Most politely, it does not resemble too closely Duchamp's own artistic approach: while the idiosyncratic line of the graph might suggest Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages*, the periodicity of the heartbeat insures that the cardiogram is as far as possible from chance.

Ireland's artificial oscilloscopes themselves consist of gray-painted wooden boxes of rather Minimal numbness, as much like mock-ups for real laboratory equipment as for sculpture. They either have a circular window cut through the face, or else an inset carpenter's level that supplies three small circular windows (where the light path copies the jagged heartbeat) alternating with elongated lateral windows (through which the point of light passes at a steady pace). In one of the boxes with one window the rate of the heartbeat is exaggeratedly slow, implying a protraction of body time like Duchamp's own fascination with procedures of "delay" and suggesting that because the pulsation is slowed down, Duchamp might not in this case have yet exhausted his earthly allotment of beats.

The two-dimensional works consisting of multiple banks of circles (images of the cardiographic leads), or vertical rows of them, break down the transcribed heartbeat into tiny slices of life-time. This stop-frame freezing of the *élan vital* seems cinematographic; it also entails a suspicion that if these moments really are separable and distinct, then it is paradoxical to consider that a smooth motion continues "out" of one and "into" the next. The vertical row of circular glimpses has a more data-bound quality than the multiple horizontal registers, no doubt because the circles read more suggestively as one framed image in a filmlike continuum, its content moving through successive phases. The banks of leads, however, undergo a transformation into stable, self-sufficient patterns. The small acetate books, with these same fragmentary configurations superseding one another from page to page, push the cinematographic implication toward a more literal extreme by seeming capable of *animation* as the pages flip by.

Ireland's pencil sketches of circular cardiographic leads show an ingratiatingly craftsmanly in-drawing up to and around the notational but abstract motif—the mountainous, impulsively calligraphic line. Their light muscular touch suggests a fade-out not unlike the optical fade of a point moving across an oscilloscope, or the very fade of a man's last heartbeat into its final graphic trace.

—Joseph Masheck



## CATALOGUE

(Works are listed in chronological order from April 1966 to April 1967)

1. *Uncut Cardiogram*, 1966, ink on paper, 95½ x 1½".
2. *Mounted Cardiogram*, 1966, ink on paper, 11 x 8½".
3. *Study for Portrait of Duchamp I*, 1966, ink and liquitex on graph paper, 14½ x 20½".
4. *Three Leads; Study for Portrait of Duchamp I*, 1966, liquitex on cardboard, 36 x 27".
5. *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp: Three Leads*, 1966, mixed media, 7 x 30¾ x 6¾".
6. *Study for Portrait of Duchamp II*, 1967, ink on paper, 29 x 33".
7. *Study for Portrait of Duchamp II*, 1967, ink on paper, 29 x 33".
8. *Study for Portrait of Duchamp II*, 1967, liquitex on cardboard, 74 x 6".
9. *Study for Portrait of Duchamp II and III*, 1967, liquitex on cardboard, 31½ x 29½".
10. *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp II*, first lead, resting pulse rate, 1967, mixed media, 18 x 18 x 8".
11. *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp III*, slow pulse rate, 1967, mixed media, 16½ x 16½ x 8".
12. *Book*, 1967, liquitex and ink on acetate, 8½ x 5½".
13. *Book*, 1967, liquitex and ink on acetate, 8½ x 5½".
14. *Drawing of First Lead*, 1967, pencil on board, 18 x 18".
15. *Drawing of Three Leads*, 1967, pencil on board, 18 x 18".
16. *Drawing of Six Leads*, 1967, pencil on board, 18 x 18".

*Study for Portrait of Duchamp II*, 1967, liquitex on cardboard, 74 x 6".

Catalogue design: Nancy Foote



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